

*Letters sent from the Soldiers to their families.*

*During WWI, soldiers were encouraged to write letters to friends and family in Britain. Most men decided it would be better to conceal the horrors of the trench warfare. As a result of the Defense of the Realm Act that was passed in 1914, all letters that the men wrote should have been read and censored by junior officers. However, some officers could not bring themselves to read their men's letters and these arrived in Britain unaltered.*

(1) Private H. F. Leppard of East Grinstead wrote a letter to his mother on 19th December, 1914. The letter was not censored.

The soldiers at the front need more rest. While in the trenches the water is over our knees most of the time. The war is going to last some time yet, and might be another twelve months before it is over. The war has only just begun and its going to be a war of exhaustion. After the regular armies have done their work it means that all the young lads at home being trained and disciplined and will take our place in the field. The sooner people understand this, the better, it will be for the nation.

(2) Private Stanley Terry of 15 North End, East Grinstead, wrote a letter to his family in November, 1915. The letter was not censored.

We have just come out of the trenches after being in for six days and up to our waists in water. While we were in the trenches one of the Germans came over to our trench for a cigarette and then back again, and he was not fired at. We and the Germans started walking about in the open between the two trenches, repairing them, and there was no firing at all. I think they are all getting fed up with it.

(3) Private James Mitchell of 7 Church Lane, East Grinstead, wrote a letter to his father on 17th October, 1914.

We started away just after dawn from our camp and I think it was about an hour later that we encountered the enemy. They were on the opposite side of the valley and as we came over the brow of the hill they opened on us with rifle fire and shrapnel from about 900 yards. We lost three officers and about 100 men killed and wounded in that half hour. I do not want any more days like that one. (this section censored) Anyway we drove the Germans back and held them there for eight days. I cannot tell you all I should like to, as it would never reach you.

(4) In the 1930s Guy Chapman wrote an account of his experiences during the First World War.

I have an old platoon roll before me; three pages of names, numbers, trades, next-of-kin, religions, rifle numbers, and so forth. Faces come back out of the past to answer to these barren details, the face of this man dead, of that vanished for ever. Here and there rise memories of their habits, their nicknames, the look of one as he spoke to you, the attitude of another shivering in the night air, as he leaned over the parapet, watching with tired bloodshot eyes. Some of the faces have disappeared. did I know you? I censored your letters, casually, hurriedly avoiding your personal messages, your poignant hopes.